

Chapter 4

Introduction to Positive Behavior Support

Functions of Behavior

The function of behavior is the reason people behave in a certain way. The reason for a behavior can be described in terms of the *reinforcement* that is maintaining it and the favorable outcome that it creates. People engage in millions of different behaviors each day, but the reasons for doing these different behaviors fall into one or more of the following three main categories.

- Category one includes motivations related to getting something. These could be things like pleasure, attention, respect, power, privilege, and objects.
- The second category includes motivations related to avoiding something. These could include avoiding work, avoiding social situations, avoiding embarrassment, and avoiding stress.
- The third category includes motivations related to stopping something from continuing. These could include things like pain, discomfort, and negative sensory stimuli.

Setting Events and Triggers

Setting Events are contributing factors that could increase the likelihood of the behavior occurring. They are a variety of things that potentially “set the table” for behavior to take place. These could include things such as health related problems, lack of knowledge or ability, poor self-regulation skills, ongoing social and emotional issues, and environmental factors. Below is a list of sample setting events by category.

PHYSICAL/MEDICAL		SOCIAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL		ENVIRONMENTAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Illness• Constipation• Allergies• Sexual anxiety• Medication side effects• Pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discomfort• Sensory issues• Missed Meal• Hunger/thirst• Chronic health issues• Sleep pattern disruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disappointment• Loss• Depression• Anger issues• Anxiety over upcoming event• Major life change• Lack of experience• Lack of situational comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear• Call from friend• Recent argument• Trauma history• Planning a vacation• Low impulse control• Low tolerance for frustration• Heightened need of attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moving• Noise level• Boredom• Lack of routine• Lack of stimulation• Disrupted routine• Change of support staff• Poor planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weather• Being late• Being rushed• Miscommunication• Overcrowding• Temperature• Unfamiliar surroundings• Confusion regarding directions• Absence of organization

Fundamentals

Triggers

Triggers are the immediate prompts that provoke the behavior. They can be a wide variety of prompts. Some examples include a request or demand, a comment, refusal or presentation of food, an object or an activity, losing a game, or a message.

Functional Assessments

Functional assessments attempt to determine the function (purpose) of an individual's behaviors. They seek to identify the logic behind someone's behaviors and serve as the foundation for developing a prevention-focused Positive Behavior Support plan as well as intervention and proactive action plans to provide instructional and environmental supports, effective communication strategies, reinforcement methods and reactive approaches.

Functional Assessments are created through a combination of direct observation of the individual, consulting with relevant professionals, interviewing family and staff members, and reviews of prior assessments, incident reports and other related documentation. The information is then used to define specific negative behaviors, identify times and situations where they will occur and describe the functions that the negative behavior produces for the individual. Some of the areas that are assessed include an individual's current and past relationships, their environment, communication abilities and practices, skills and abilities, personal history, interests, diagnosis, medications and possible setting events and triggers.

Environmental Elements that Support Positive Behavior

Environment contributes more significantly to how we "feel" than we are consciously aware. To provide the best assistance to individuals and proactively support their positive choices, we need to be keenly aware of environmental factors that may impede their choices. Here are just a few things to keep in mind:

- Noisy environments can create anxiety for some individuals.
- Some people have significant issues with uncomfortable clothing and other tactile sensitivities.
- Temperature can impact people differently. Remember that it is *their* comfort level that is the priority, not yours.
- An overly busy or chaotic environment can produce negative behaviors for some individuals.
- Are there changes that could be made that would help with comfort? What kind of accessibility improvements could be made for those with mobility issues?
- Are there environment changes or potential changes that can cause problems?
- Is their home decorated and furnished according to what makes them happy? Do they feel a sense of pride and ownership?
- Is the home clean and free of clutter?
- Are there safe and comfortable places to relax outside?
- Is there a wide variety of activities of interest to the individual in the home? Are they easily accessible?
- Are clocks and calendars easy to locate and read?

Dignity and Respect in Daily Interactions

"In my early professional years I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth?"

- Carl Rogers

Fundamentals

Building positive relationships is rooted in respect. Positive relationships promote trust, cooperation and growth. Whether we intend to or not, we serve as models for the individuals we support. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you grow and model a relationship with the individual you support.

- Your behaviors and words should always match. Do what you say; say what you do.
- Practice and demonstrate empathy.
- Extend unconditional, positive respect. Respect is not earned; it is to be freely given.
- Abolish judgment. It is usually rooted in self-righteousness.
- Be collaborative and helpful whenever possible.
- Treat all adults as adults. Value and respect them accordingly. Use age appropriate communication.
- Seek understanding. Seeking to understand rather than to be understood demonstrates the highest respect.
- Acknowledge them in all circumstances. Seek their participation and presence.
- Listen intently. Give them your undivided attention.
- Always be truthful.
- Use respectful body language and tone of voice in all conversations.
- Accept their individuality and idiosyncrasies.

Power Struggles

Power struggles are an attempt to create power over another individual, retain a position of power or establish a sense of personal empowerment through taking it from someone else. They can occur when we are unbendable, when someone has a need to “win,” or when someone feels personally powerless. Unfortunately, they are always a lose-lose proposition for everyone involved, build resentment and distrust, set the state for aggression and negative behaviors, and increase the likelihood of future power struggles. Here are tips for avoiding and dealing with power struggles.

- The more power and choice an individual has in their life, the less frequently they initiate power struggles. Be certain to provide power and choice frequently. Even small, seemingly insignificant choices can go a long way to helping an individual to feel empowered.
- When an individual makes a decision that turns out poorly, don’t ‘rub it in.’ Be empathetic and encouraging.
- Don’t start power struggles!! Our lack of flexibility, our need to keep things “under control,” our incorrect viewpoint of ourselves as an “authority figure,” our tendency to take things personally, and even our desire to ensure the “best” for someone can overwhelm our ability to see clearly.
- Don’t take the bait. Sometimes, things are said or done just to provoke a response from you. Don’t react.
- Create a win-win whenever possible. You don’t need to come out on top. This isn’t parenting!
- Don’t be afraid to “lose.” As a matter of fact, be sure to apologize and ask for their forgiveness if you’re wrong.
- Don’t involve others. A larger audience creates a more powerful desire to “win” in order to avoid looking bad in front of others.

The Escalation Cycle

People get upset. Upset people often engage in challenging behaviors. Challenging behaviors can escalate into a behavioral crisis. As an individual escalates, simple agitation behaviors such as arguing, pacing, rocking, and raised voices can become intimidation behaviors that involve swearing, name calling and verbal threats. The highest form of an escalation cycle is violence. The violence can occur against property, another person, or even themselves. It’s important that we learn how to recognize the escalation cycle and how to respond to help an individual de-escalate. Here are some things to remember when dealing with the escalation cycle.

- Provide them with your undivided attention.
- Allow them to vent. Listen for feelings and acknowledge them. Their feelings are what is causing them problems, not the situation. If we focus on the situation, we’re not focusing on the true problem.

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- During the agitation phase, ask “Can we sit down? I’d really like to hear more about this.” Sitting down can help de-escalate. But even if they refuse, your genuine desire to listen to them can help.
- Let them have their feelings without judging them or correcting them, no matter how strong the feelings are.
- As agitation increases in the individual you support, you must not allow your own anxiety to increase as well. If you become anxious, angry or upset it will only serve to exacerbate their emotions.
- Use reflective listening skills.
- Do not take their escalation personally - even if they begin accusing you or calling you names.
- Use a calming, steady voice. Don’t try to match their pace or volume. Speak more quietly and slowly.
- If what you are doing or saying is increasing their anxiety instead of calming them, more than likely, what you’re doing isn’t working. Try something else.

De-escalation Don’ts!!

Don’t say “calm down.”

Don’t tell them how they “should” feel.

Don’t tell them how they “should” see things.

Don’t rush them.

Don’t rush to resolution or problem solving.

Don’t minimize their feelings or perceptions.

Don’t tell them that “it will be okay.”

Don’t lecture, use logic or persuasion.

Don’t try to solve the problem.

Don’t get defensive.

Don’t interrogate by asking a lot of questions.

Don’t focus on the situation. Focus on feelings.

Don’t criticize them or their feelings.

Don’t get pulled into triangulation.